

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

May 29, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader Schumer, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

We write to urge you to include dedicated funding in future legislation to help ensure that college and university students with the greatest financial need can access high-speed internet during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

As colleges and universities across the country have transitioned to distance learning to limit the spread of coronavirus, many students who relied on campus resources are struggling to continue their education from home.¹ One of the biggest barriers for students of color, students in rural areas, and other disadvantaged students is lack of access to reliable and affordable internet connectivity, equipment required for connectivity, and devices. These are all required to participate in distance learning. Even before the pandemic, only 66 percent of black households,² 61 percent of Hispanic households,³ and 63 percent of rural households had access to broadband,⁴ and one survey found that about 20 percent of college students did not have consistent access to technology, such as laptops and tablets.⁵ Another survey found that 30 percent of students experienced difficulty connecting to the internet when accessing course

¹ Strunsky, Steve. (2020, April 20). *Coronavirus left some college students without laptops or on-campus jobs, so help stepped in*. NJ.com. Retrieved from <https://www.nj.com/coronavirus/2020/04/coronavirus-left-some-college-students-without-laptops-or-on-campus-jobs-so-help-stepped-in.html>

² Perrin, Andrew and Turner, Erica. (2019, August 20). *Smartphones help blacks, Hispanics bridge some – but not all – digital gaps with whites*. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/08/20/smartphones-help-blacks-hispanics-bridge-some-but-not-all-digital-gaps-with-whites/>

³ Perrin, Andrew and Turner, Erica. (2019, August 20). *Smartphones help blacks, Hispanics bridge some – but not all – digital gaps with whites*. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/08/20/smartphones-help-blacks-hispanics-bridge-some-but-not-all-digital-gaps-with-whites/>

⁴ Perrin, Andrew. (2019, May 31). *Digital gap between rural and nonrural American persists*. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/05/31/digital-gap-between-rural-and-nonrural-america-persists/>

⁵ Indiana University. (2018, September 19). *College students have unequal access to reliable technology, study finds*. ScienceDaily. Retrieved from www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2018/09/180919100950.htm

material online during the pandemic.⁶ Without action from Congress to address these disparities, students are at serious risk of falling behind and missing out on job and academic opportunities provided by the internet.

While the spring semester is ending, colleges and universities are moving summer classes and programs online and will likely continue distance learning into the next school year. As it remains unclear when effective treatment or a vaccine will be available, connecting college and university students to the internet is even more essential.⁷

Although the CARES Act included funding for institutions of higher education, it did not include dedicated funding sufficient to ensure that college and university students have essential internet connectivity. It is for this reason we introduced the bicameral Supporting Connectivity for Higher Education Students in Need Act,⁸ which is supported by over 60 higher education, civil rights, and public interest organizations.⁹ We urge you to include \$1 billion in dedicated funding in a future coronavirus relief package to establish an Emergency Higher Education Connectivity fund at the National Telecommunications and Information Administration to help ensure that college and university students with the greatest financial need at historically Black colleges and universities, Tribal colleges and universities, Hispanic-serving institutions, and other minority-serving institutions, as well as rural-serving institutions, can pay for at-home internet connectivity, equipment, and devices such as laptops and tablets.

Thank you for your attention to this highly important issue. We stand ready to work with you to help keep college and university students connected at this critical time.

Sincerely,



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

/S/
Mazie Hirono
United States Senator



Anna G. Eshoo
Member of Congress

/S/
Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

⁶ Clark, Ashley. (2020, May 11). *Today's Students Need Access to Affordable and Reliable Broadband Services*. Medium. Retrieved from <https://medium.com/higher-learning-advocates/todays-students-need-access-to-affordable-and-reliable-broadband-services-f9c39068a96b>

⁷ Fauci, Anthony. (2020, May 12). *Hearing on "COVID-19: Safely Getting Back to Work and Back to School"*. U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education Labor & Pensions. Retrieved from <https://www.help.senate.gov/hearings/covid-19-safely-getting-back-to-work-and-back-to-school>

⁸ H.R. 6814 and S. 3701, identical bills, were introduced on May 12, 2020.

⁹ A full list of endorsers of the legislation can be found at <https://eshoo.house.gov/media/press-releases/eps-eshoo-matsui-butterfield-castro-fudge-blunt-rochester-adams-and-sen>.

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Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

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Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

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Ron Wyden
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Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

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Jacky Rosen
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Doris Matsui
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Lisa Blunt Rochester
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Alma S. Adams, Ph.D.
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Eleanor Holmes Norton
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